SOLDIER SONGS

By

PATRICK MACGILL

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SOLDIER SONGS

WITHDRAWN

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MY DEAR H. J.,

You have often asked me what are the favourite songs of the soldier on Active Service, the rhymed lines which give expression to his soul. It is difficult to give an answer, the mere words are "dud" shells, which drop harmlessly to earth close to their objective. The soldier and his song cannot be separated from their surroundings.

Let me explain and quote in illustration an incident which occurred a few weeks ago.

A certain regiment, which glories in the name of the "Old Diehards," sent a

draft to the "London Irish," and the new-comers attached to our battalion became part of the units' fighting strength. Sixty per cent of the draft were "old sweats," men who had fought well on many a bloody field, and added by prowess of arms numerous honours to their own beloved regiment. They had shared their last crust with hearty comrades in the retreat from Mons, they battled side by side with these comrades on the Marne, and wept over their graves by the Aisne.

The circumstances of war strengthen the *esprit-de-corps* of a soldier, and I am not far wrong in stating that pride of regiment in an "old sweat" is much stronger than love of country. On the evening of their arrival these veterans

sat in their huts and sang the song of the "Old Diehards." Mere doggerel the verse, the words fatuous, and the singing not above reproach. But the song touched the hearts of the audience; the listeners were "old sweats" who had songs of their own.

As I listened I thought of the children of Israel, who hung their harps on the willows and mourned for Babylon. The feeling engendered in a man when a futile shell drops close to him and fails to explode is difficult to make manifest in cold words; but it is even more difficult to give an adequate idea of the impression created in the hearts of those who listened to the song of the "Old Diehards." The soldiers have songs of their own, songs of the march, the trench,

the billet and battle. Their origin is lost; the songs have arisen like old folk-tales, spontaneous choruses that voice the moods of a moment and of many moments which are monotonously alike. Most of the verse is of no import; the crowd has no sense of poetic values; it is the singing alone which gives expression to the soldier's soul. "Tipperary" means home when it is sung in a shell-shattered billet, on the long march "Tipperary" is Berlin, the goal of high emprise and great adventures.

Let me speak of a few songs which we sing. This is our idea of the peace which may follow our years of war.

"When the war is over
We're going to live in Dover,
When the war is over we're going to have a spree,

We're going to have a fight
In the middle of the night
With the whizz-bangs a-flying in the air."

Though we cannot picture a peace which will be in no way associated with high explosives, we can dream in the midst of the conflict of the desirable things that civil life would bring us.

What time we waited for Kitchener's Army in Flanders and lost all hope of ever seeing it, this song was sung up and down the trenches by the Territorials and Regulars.

"Who are the boys that fighting's for,
Who are the lads to win the war,
It's good old Kitchener's Army.
And every man of them's très bon,
They never lost a trench since Mons,
Because they never saw one."

Here are a few others which have echoed in billets and dug-outs from Le Harve to the Somme, and which have accompanied the wild abandon of drinking nights in Poperinghe and Bethune.

THE SOLDIER'S LETTER

"I've lost my rifle and bayonet,
I've lost my pull-through too,
I've lost the socks that you sent me
That lasted the whole winter through,
I've lost the razor that shaved me,
I've lost my four-by-two,
I've lost my hold-all and now I've got damn all
Since I've lost you."

SING ME TO SLEEP

Sing me to sleep where bullets fall,
Let me forget the war and all;
Damp is my dug-out, cold my feet,
Nothing but bully and biscuits to eat.
Over the sandbags helmets you'll find
Corpses in front and corpses behind.

Chorus.

Far, far from Ypres I long to be,
Where German snipers can't get at me,
Think of me crouching where the worms creep,
Waiting for the sergeant to sing me to sleep.

Sing me to sleep in some old shed,
The rats all running around my head,
Stretched out upon my waterproof,
Dodging the raindrops through the roof,
Dreaming of home and nights in the West,
Somebody's overseas boots on my chest.

The Tommy is a singing soldier; he sings to the village patronne even when ordering food, and his song is in French.

"Voulez vous donnez moi
Si'l vous plaît
Pain et beurre
Et café au lait."

He serenades the maiden at the village pump.

"Après la guerre fini
Soldat Anglais partee,
M'selle Frongsay boko pleury,
Après la guerre fini."

The soldier has in reality very few songs; he has many choruses which get worth from the mood that inspires them and the emotions which they evoke. None will outlast the turmoil in which they originated; having weathered the leaden storms of war, their vibrant strains will be choked and smothered in atmospheres of Peace. "These 'ere songs are no good in England," my friend Rifleman Bill Teake remarks. "They 'ave too much guts in them."

When I said I wanted to dedicate "Soldier Songs" to you I did not then anticipate inflicting upon you so lengthy

a dedicatory letter; but when writing of the men of the British armies, old and new, I find it difficult to be concise.

Yours,

PATRICK MACGILL.

Lammas Day, 1916.

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SOLDIER SONGS

AFTER LOOS

(Café Pierre le Blanc, Nouex les Mines, Michaelmas Eve, 1915.)

Was it only yesterday
Lusty comrades marched away?
Now they're covered up with clay.

Seven glasses used to be
Called for six good mates and me—
Now we only call for three.

Little crosses neat and white,
Looking lonely every night,
Tell of comrades killed in fight.

Hearty fellows they have been,
And no more will they be seen
Drinking wine in Nouex les Mines.

Lithe and supple lads were they,
Marching merrily away—
Was it only yesterday?

THE OLE SWEATS

(*1st Birmingham War Hospital, Ruberry, Birmingham.*)

WE'RE goin' easy now a bit, all dressed in
blighty blue,*
We've 'eld the trenches eighteen months and
copped some packets too,
We've met the Boches on the Marne and
fought them on the Aisne,
We broke 'em up at New Chapelle and 'ere
we are again.
The ole sweats—
All that is left of the ole sweats.
More went away than are with us to-day.
Gawd! but we miss 'em, the ole sweats.

* Hospital uniform.

And now that we've a blighty one * we don't
know what to do!—
Just swing the lead; the Darby boys will see
the bisness through,
They'll 'ave a bit o' carry on, o' fightin' and
o' fun,
They'll 'ave the ribbons when they end the
work that we begun.
The ole sweats—
Devils for fun were the ole sweats,
In love or a scrap sure they always went
nap,
They 'adn't 'arf guts had the ole sweats.

But the old sweats they never die, they only
fade away
And others come to take their place, 'ot on
the doin's they;

* A blighty one. A wound which brings a soldier back to England.

They're drillin' up from day to day, at it at dusk and dawn,
But they'll need it all to fill the shoes of blokes that now are gone;
The ole sweats,
The ole daisy-shovers,* the ole sweats.
The new 'uns it's said they are smart on parade,
But, Gawd, there is none like the ole sweats.

We're out 't for duration now and do not care a cuss,
There's beer to spare at dinner time and afters† now for us,
But if our butty's still were out in Flanders raisin' Cain,
We'd weather through with those we knew on bully beef again.

* Daisy-shovers. The dead; "the men who lie under the ground, shoving the daisies up with their toes."
† Afters = confiture.

The ole sweats—
The grub it was skimp with the ole sweats.
But if rashuns was small 'twas the same for us all,
Same for the 'ole of the ole sweats.

Well, if you want a sooveneer, a bit of blighty blue,
There's empty tunic sleeves to spare, a trousers leg or two,
And some day when you see us stand on Charing Cross parade,
Present a boot before us just to 'elp us at our trade.
The ole sweats—
Tuppence a shine with the ole sweats.
So you'll give us a show when you see us, we know,
Us that is left of the ole sweats.

LA BASSEE ROAD

(*Cuinchy*, 1915.)

You'll see from the La Bassée Road, on any summer's day,
The children herding nanny-goats, the women making hay.
You'll see the soldiers, khaki clad, in column and platoon,
Come swinging up La Bassée Road from billets in Bethune.
There's hay to save and corn to cut, but harder work by far
Awaits the soldier boys who reap the harvest fields of war.
You'll see them swinging up the road where women work at hay,
The straight long road,—La Bassée Road,
—on any summer day.

The night-breeze sweeps La Bassée Road, the night-dews wet the hay,
The boys are coming back again, a straggling crowd are they.
The column's lines are broken, there are gaps in the platoon,
They'll not need many billets, now, for soldiers in Bethune,
For many boys, good lusty boys, who marched away so fine,
Have now got little homes of clay beside the firing line.
Good luck to them, God speed to them, the boys who march away,
A-singing up La Bassée road each sunny summer day.

A LAMENT

(*The Ritz-Loos Salient.*)

I WISH the sea were not so wide
That parts me from my love;
I wish the things men do below
Were known to God above.

I wish that I were back again
In the glens of Donegal,
They'll call me coward if I return,
But a hero if I fall.

"Is it better to be a living coward,
Or thrice a hero dead?"
"It's better to go to sleep, my lad,"
The Colour Sergeant said.

THE GUNS

(*Shivery-shake Dug-out, Maroc.*)

THERE'S a battery snug in the spinney,
A French seventy-five in the mine,
A big nine-point-two in the village
Three miles to the rear of the line.
The gunners will clean them at dawning
And slumber beside them all day,
But the guns chant a chorus at sunset,
And then you should hear what they say.

Chorus.

Whizz bang! pip squeak! ss-ss-st!
Big guns, little guns waken up to it.
We're in for heaps of trouble, dug-outs at the double,
And stretcher-bearers ready to tend the boys who're hit.

And then there's the little machine-gun,—
A beggar for blood going large.
Go, fill up his belly with iron,
And he'll spit in the face of a charge.
The foe fixed his ladders at daybreak,
He's over the top with the sun;
He's waiting; for ever he's waiting,
The pert little vigilant gun.

Chorus.

Its tit-tit! tit-tit! tit! tit! tit!
Hark the little terror bristling up to it!
See his victims lying, wounded sore and dying—
Red the field and volume on which his name is writ.

The howitzer lurks in an alley,
(The howitzer isn't a fool,)

With a bearing of snub-nosed detachment
He squats like a toad on a stool.
He's a close-lipped and masterly beggar,
A fellow with little to say,
But the little he says he can say in
A most irrepressible way.

Chorus.

OO—plonk! OO-plonk! plonk! plonk! plonk!
The bomb that bears the message riots through the air.
The dug-outs topple over on the foemen under cover,
They'll slumber through revelly who get the message there!

The battery barks in the spinney,
The howitzer *plonks* like the deuce,

The big nine point two speaks like thunder
And shatters the houses in Loos,
Sharp chatters the little machine-gun,
Oh! when will its chattering stop?—
At dawn, when we swarm up the ladders;
At dawn we go over the top!

Chorus.

Whizz bang! pip squeak! OO-plonk! sst!
Up the ladders! Over! And carry on with it!
The guns all chant their chorus, the shells go whizzing o'er us:—
Forward, hearties! Forward to do our little bit!

THE NIGHT BEFORE AND THE NIGHT AFTER THE CHARGE

On sword and gun the shadows reel and riot,
A lone breeze whispers at the dug-out door,
The trench is silent and the night is quiet,
And boys in khaki slumber on the floor.
A sentinel on guard, my watch I keep
And guard the dug-out where my comrades sleep.

The moon looks down upon a ghost-like figure,
Delving a furrow in the cold, damp sod.
The grave is ready and the lonely digger
Leaves the departed to their rest and God.
I shape a little cross and plant it deep
To mark the dug-out where my comrades sleep.

IT'S A FAR, FAR CRY

It's a far, far cry to my own land,
A hundred leagues or more,
To moorlands where the fairies flit
In Rosses and Gweedore,
Where white-maned waves come prancing up
To Dooran's rugged shore.

There's a cabin there by a holy well,
Once blessed by Columbcille,
And a holly bush and a fairy fort
On the slope of Glenties Hill,
Where the dancing feet of many winds
Go roving at their will.

My heart is sick of the level lands,
Where the wingless windmills be,
Where the long-nosed guns from dusk to dawn
Are speaking angrily;
But the little home by Glenties Hill,
Ah! that's the place for me.

A candle stuck on the muddy floor
Lights up the dug-out wall,
And I see in its flame the prancing sea
And the mountains straight and tall;
For my heart is more than often back
By the hills of Donegal.

OFF DUTY

THE night is full of magic, and the moonlit dewdrops glisten
Where the blossoms close in slumber and the questing bullets pass—
Where the bullets hit the level I can hear them as I listen,
Like a little cricket concert, chirping chorus in the grass.

In the dug-out by the traverse there's a candle-flame a-winking
And the fireflies on the sandbags have their torches all aflame.
As I watch them in the moonlight, sure, I cannot keep from thinking,
That the world I knew and this one carry on the very same.

Look! A gun flash to the eastward!
"Cover, matey! Under cover!
Don't you know the flash of danger? You
should know that signal well;
You can hear it as it's coming. There it
passes; swooping over.
There's a threat of desolation in the passing
of a shell."

Little spears of grass are waving, decked
with jewels iridescent—
Hark! A man on watch is stricken—I can
hear his dying moan—
Lies a road across the starland near the wan
and waning crescent,
Where a sentinel off-duty goes to reach his
Maker's Throne.

I OFT GO OUT AT NIGHT-TIME

I OFT go out at night-time
When all the sky's a-flare
And little lights of battle
Are dancing in the air.

I use my pick and shovel
To dig a little hole,
And there I sit till morning—
A listening-patrol.

A silly little sickle
Of moon is hung above;
Within a pond beside me
The frogs are making love:

I see the German sap-head;
A cow is lying there,
Its belly like a barrel,
Its legs are in the air.

The big guns rip like thunder,
The bullets whizz o'erhead,
But o'er the sea in England
Good people lie abed.

And over there in England
May every honest soul
Sleep sound while we sit watching
On listening patrol.

THE CROSS

(*On the grave of an unknown British soldier, Givenchy, 1915.*)

THE cross is twined with gossamer,—
The cross some hand has shaped with care,
And by his grave the grasses stir
But he is silent sleeping there.

The guns speak loud: he hears them not;
The night goes by: he does not know;
A lone white cross stands on the spot,
And tells of one who sleeps below.

The brooding night is hushed and still,
The crooning breeze draws quiet breath,
A star-shell flares upon the hill
And lights the lowly house of death.

Unknown, a soldier slumbers there,
While mournful mists come dropping low,
But oh! a weary maiden's prayer,
And oh! a mother's tears of woe.

THE TOMMY'S LAMENT

(*The Ritz-Loos Salient.*)

I FANCY it's not 'arf my chance
To go on plodding 'neath my pack,
Parading like a snail through France,
My house upon my bloomin' back.

My wants are few, but what I need
Ain't not so much of bully stew,
Nor biscuits, that's a mongrel's feed,
But, matey, just 'twixt me and you—

When winks the early evening star,
And shadows o'er the trenches come—
I wish the sergeants brought a jar,
And issued double tots of rum.

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MARCHING

(*La Bassée Road, June,* 1915.)

Four by four, in column of route,
By roads that the poplars sentinel,
Clank of rifle and crunch of boot—
All are marching and all is well.
White, so white is the distant moon,
Salmon-pink is the furnace glare
And we hum, as we march, a ragtime tune,
Khaki boys in the long platoon,
Ready for anything—anywhere.

Lonely and still the village lies,
The houses sleep and the blinds are drawn,
The road is straight as the bullet flies,
And we go marching into the dawn;

Salmon-pink is the furnace sheen.

Where the coal stacks bulk in the ghostly air

The long platoons on the move are seen,

Little connecting files between,

Moving and moving, anywhere.

IN FAIRYLAND

The field is red with poppy flowers,
Where mushroom meadows stand;
It's only seven fairy hours
From there to Fairyland.

Now when the star-shells riot up
In flares of red and green,
Each fairy leaves her buttercup
And goes to see her queen.

Where little, ghostly moonbeams stray
Through mushroom alleys white,
The fairies carry on their way
A glow-worm lamp for light.

For them the journey's always short;
They're happy as you please,
A-riding to the Fairy Court
On backs of bumble-bees.

The cricket and the grasshopper
Are thridding in the grass,
And making paths of gossamer
For fairy feet to pass.

Whene'er I see a glow-worm light
In Boyau* seventeen,
I know the fairies go that night
To see the Fairy Queen.

* French communication trench.

SPOILS OF WAR

I HAVE a big French rifle, its stock is riddled
clean,
And shrapnel-smashed its barrel, likewise its
magazine.
I've lugged it from Bethune to Loos and back
from Loos again,
I've found it on the battlefield amidst the
soldiers slain.
A little battle souvenir for one across the
foam
That's if the French authorities will let me
take it home.

I've got a long, long sabre as sharp as any
lance,

'Twas carried by a shepherd boy from somewhere South in France
Where grasses wave and poppy-flowers are red as blood is red.
I took the shepherd's sabre for the shepherd boy lay dead.
I'll take it back a souvenir to one across the foam
That's if the French authorities will let me take it home,
That's if our own authorities will give me leave for home! ! !

BEFORE THE CHARGE

(*Loos*, 1915.)

THE night is still and the air is keen,
Tense with menace the time crawls by,
In front is the town and its homes are seen,
Blurred in outline against the sky.

The dead leaves float in the sighing air,
The darkness moves like a curtain drawn,
A veil which the morning sun will tear
From the face of death.—We charge at dawn.

LETTERS

(*Vermelles, August,* 1915.)

WHEN stand-to hour is over we leave the
parapet,
And scamper to our dug-out to smoke a
cigarette;
The post has brought in parcels and letters
for us all,
And now we'll light a candle, a little penny
candle,
A tiny tallow candle, and stick it to the wall.

Dark shadows cringe and cower on roof and
wall and floor,

And little roving breezes come rustling through the door;
We open up the letters of friends across the foam,
And thoughts go back to London, again we dream of London—
We see the lights of London, of London and of home.

We've parcels small and parcels of a quite gigantic size,
We've Devon cream and butter and apples baked in pies,
We'll make a night of feasting and all will have their fill—
See, cot-mate Bill has dainties, such dandy, dinky dainties,

She's one to choose the dainties, the maid
that's gone on Bill.
Oh: Kensington for neatness; it packs its
parcels well,
Though Bow is always bulky it isn't quite as
swell,
But here there's no distinction 'twixt Ken-
sington and Bow,
We're comrades in the dug-out, all equals in
the dug-out,
We're comrades in the dug-out and fight a
common foe.

Here comes the ration party with tins of
bully stew—
"Clear off your ration party, we have no need
of you;

"Maconachie for breakfast? It ain't no bloomin' use,
We're faring far, far better, our gifts from home are better,
Look here, we've something better than bully after Loos."

The post comes trenchward nightly; we hail the post with glee,
Though now we're not as many as once we used to be,
For some have done their fighting, packed up and gone away,
And many boys are sleeping, no sound will break their sleeping,
Brave lusty comrades sleeping in little homes of clay.

We all have read our letters, but one's untouched so far,
An English maiden's letter to her sweetheart at the War,
And when we write in answer to tell her how he fell,
What can we say to cheer her? Oh, what is now to cheer her?
There's nothing left to cheer her except the news to tell.

We'll write to her to-morrow and this is what we'll say,
He breathed her name in dying; in peace he passed away—
No words about his moaning, his anguish and his pain,

When slowly, slowly dying. God! Fifteen
hours in dying!
He lay a maimed thing dying, alone upon the
plain.

We often write to mothers, to sweethearts
and to wives,
And tell how those who loved them have
given up their lives;
If we're not always truthful, our lies are al-
ways kind,
Our letters lie to cheer them, to solace and
to cheer them,
Oh: anything to cheer them,—the women left
behind.

THE EVERYDAY OF WAR

(*Hospital, Versailles, November,* 1915.)

A HAND is crippled, a leg is gone,
And fighting's past for me,
The empty hours crawl slowly on;
How they flew where I used to be!
Empty hours in the empty days,
And empty months crawl by,
The brown battalions go their way,
And here at the Base I lie!

I dream of the grasses the dew-drops drench,
And the earth with the soft rain wet,
I dream of the curve of a winding trench,
And a loop-holed parapet;

The sister wraps my bandage again,
Oh, gentle the sister's hand,
But the smart of a restless longing, vain,
She cannot understand.

At night I can see the trench once more,
And the dug-out candle lit,
The shadows it throws on wall and floor
Form and flutter and flit.
Over the trenches the night-shades fall
And the questing bullet pings,
And a brazier glows by the dug-out wall,
Where the bubbling mess-tin sings.

I dream of the long, white, sleepy night
Where the fir-lined roadway runs
Up to the shell-scarred fields of fight
And the loud-voiced earnest guns;

The rolling limber and jolting cart,
The khaki-clad platoon,
The eager eye and the stout young heart,
And the silver-sandalled moon.

But here I'm kept to the narrow bed,
A maimed and broken thing—
Never a long day's march ahead
Where brown battalions swing.
But though time drags by like a wounded snake
Where the young life's lure's denied,
A good stiff lip for the old pal's sake,
And the old battalion's pride!

The ward-fire burns in a cheery way,
A vision in every flame,
There are books to read and games to play
But oh! for an old, old game,

With glancing bay-net and trusty gun
And wild blood, bursting free!—
But an arm is crippled, a leg is gone,
And the game's no more for me.

THE LONDON LADS

(While standing to arms in billets, La Beuvriere, July, 1915.)

ALONG the road in the evening the brown
battalions wind,
With the trenches' threat of death before,
the peaceful homes behind;
And luck is with you or luck is not as the
ticket of fate is drawn,
The boys go up to the trench at dusk, but
who will come back at dawn?

The winds come soft of an evening o'er the
fields of golden grain,
The good sharp scythes will cut the corn ere
we come back again;

The village girls will tend the grain and mill
the Autumn yield
While we go forth to other work upon an-
other field.

They'll cook the big brown Flemish loaves
and tend the oven fire,
And while they do the daily toil of barn and
bench and byre
They'll think of hearty fellows gone and sigh
for them in vain—
The billet boys, the London lads who won't
come back again.

THE LITTLE BROWN BIRD

THERE's a little brown bird in the spinney,
With a little gold cap on its head,
Gold as the gold of a guinea,
And its legs they are wobbly and red.

MYSELF. "Little brown bird, is your singing
Over and finished and done?"

BIRD. "I wait for the fairy who's bringing
Spring and its showers and its sun."

MYSELF. "What will you do in December?"

BIRD. "Do? What I'm doing just now:
Here on the first of November,
Shivering mute on a bough."

MYSELF. "But April will find you quite
cheery!"
I said with a pang in my breast.
BIRD. "In April I'll get me a dearie
And help her to fashion a nest."

THE LISTENING-PATROL

With my bosom friend, Bill, armed ready to kill,
I go over the top as a listening-patrol.
Good watch we will keep if we don't fall asleep,
As we huddle for warmth in a shell-shovelled hole.

In the battle-lit night all the plain is alight,
Where the grasshoppers chirp to the frogs in the pond,
And the star-shells are seen bursting red, blue, and green,
O'er the enemy's trench just a stone's-throw beyond.

The grasses hang damp o'er each wee glow-worm lamp
That is placed on the ground for a fairy camp-fire,
And the night-breezes wheel where the mice squeak and squeal,
Making sounds like the enemy cutting our wire.

Here are thousands of toads in their ancient abodes,
Each toad on its stool and each stool in its place,
And a robin sits by with a vigilant eye
On a grim garden-spider's wife washing her face.

Now Bill never sees any marvels like these,
When I speak of the sights he looks up with amaze,

And he smothers a yawn, saying, "Wake me at dawn,"
While the Dustman from Nod sprinkles dust in his eyes.

But these things you'll see if you come out with me,
And sit by my side in a shell-shovelled hole,
Where the fairy-bells croon to the ivory moon
When the soldier is out on a listening-patrol.

A VISION

THIS is a tale of the trenches
  Told when the shadows creep
Over the bay and traverse
  And poppies fall asleep.

When the men stand still to their rifles,
  And the star-shells riot and flare,
Flung from the sandbag alleys,
  Into the ghostly air.

They see in the growing grasses
  That rise from the beaten zone
Their poor unforgotten comrades
  Wasting in skin and bone,

And the grass creeps silently o'er them
Where comrade and foe are blent
In God's own peaceful churchyard
When the fire of their might is spent.

But the men who stand to their rifles
See all the dead on the plain
Rise at the hour of midnight
To fight their battles again.

Each to his place in the combat,
All to the parts they played
With bayonet, brisk to its purpose,
Rifle and hand grenade.

Shadow races with shadow,
Steel comes quick on steel,
Swords that are deadly silent
And shadows that do not feel.

And shades recoil and recover
  And fade away as they fall
In the space between the trenches,
  And the watchers see it all.

A.D. 1916

The sky shows cold where the roof has been,
But the stars of night are none the dimmer,
Where the home once stood are the ruins seen,
But the brazier glows with a cheery glimmer,
And the old life goes and the new life fills
The scenes of many a peasant story,
And the bursting shells on the sentried hills
Whisper of death but shout of glory!

Gutted and ripped the stricken earth,
Where the bones of the restless dead are showing;
But the great earth breathes of life and birth,
And ruin shrinks from the blossoms blowing.

The old life fails, but the new life comes
Over the ruins scarred and hoary,
Though the thunder of guns and the roll of
drums
But make for death while they shout of glory.

THE HIPE

"WHAT do you do with your rifle, son?" I
clean it every day,
And rub it with an oily rag to keep the rust
away;
I slope, present, and port the thing when
sweating on parade.
I strop my razor on the sling; the bayonet
stand is made
For me to hang my mirror on. I often use
it, too,
As handle for the dixie, sir, and lug around
the stew.
"But did you ever fire it, son?" Just once,
but never more.

I fired it at a German trench, and when my
work was o'er
The sergeant down the barrel glanced, and
then he said to me,
"Your hipe* is dirty. Penalty is seven days'
C.B.!"

* Hipe, regimental slang for a rifle.

THE TRENCH

THE long trench, twisting, turning, wanders
wayward as a river
Through the poppy-flowers blooming in
the grasses dewy wet,
The buttercups sit shyly and the daisies nod
and quiver,
Where the bright defiant bayonets rim the
sandbagged parapet,
In the peaceful dawn the trenches hold a
menace and a threat.

The last faint evening streamer touches
heaven with its finger,
The vast night's starry legion sends its
first lone herald star,

Around the bay and traverse little twilight colours linger
And incense-laden breezes come in crooning from afar,
To where above the sandbags gleam the steely fangs of war.

All the night the frogs go chuckle, all the day the birds are singing
In the pond beside the meadow, by the roadway poplar-lined,
In the field between the trenches are a million blossoms springing
'Twixt the grass of silver bayonets where the lines of battle wind
Where man has manned the trenches for the maiming of his kind.

ON ACTIVE SERVICE

For the bloke on Active Service, w'en 'e goes
across the sea,
'E's sure to stand in terror of the things 'e
doesn't see,
A 'and grenade or mortar as it leaves the
other side
You can see an' 'ear it comin', so you simply
steps aside.
The aeroplane above you may go droppin'
bombs a bit,
But lyin' in your dug-out you're unlucky if
you're 'it.
We'n the breezes fills your trenches with
hasfixiatin' gas,

You puts on your respirator an' allows the stuff to pass.

W'en you're up against a feller with a bayonet long an' keen,

Just 'ave purchase of your weapon an' you'll drill the beggar clean.

W'en man and 'oss is chargin' you, upon your knees you kneel,

An' catch the 'oss's breastbone with an inch or two of steel.

It's sure to end its canter, an' as the creature stops

The rider pitches forward an' you catch 'im as 'e drops.

It's w'en 'e sees 'is danger, an' 'e knows 'is way about

That a bloke is damned unlucky if 'e's knocked completely out.

But out on Active Service there are dangers
everywhere,
The shrapnel shell and bullet that comes on
you unaware,
The saucy little rifle is a perky little maid,
An' w'en you've got 'er message you 'ave
done your last parade.
The four-point-five will seek you from some
distant leafy wood,
An' taps you on the napper an' you're out of
step for good.
From the gun within the spinney to the sniper
up a tree
There are terrors waitin' Tommy in the
things 'e doesn't see.

LILLETS

Our old battalion billets still,
Parades as usual go on,
We buckle in with right good will
And daily our equipment don
As if we meant to fight, but no!
The guns are booming through the air,
The trenches call us on, but oh!
We don't go there, we don't go there!

At night the stars are shining bright
The old world voice is whispering near,
We've heard it when the moon was light,
And London's streets were very dear;

But dearer now they are, sweetheart,
The buses running to the Strand,—
But we're so far, so far apart,
Each lonely in a different land.

But, dear, with sentiment aside
(The candle dwindles to the cheese*)
I wish the sea were not so wide
When distance brings such thoughts as these.
One glance to see the foreign sky,
One look to note the stars o'erhead,
Sweet thoughts to you, sweetheart, and I
Turn in to billet barn, and bed.

* The Old Sweats fashion sconces from cheese.

IN THE MORNING

(*Loos*, 1915.)

The firefly haunts were lighted yet,
As we scaled the top of the parapet;
But the East grew pale to another fire,
As our bayonets gleamed by the foeman's wire;
And the sky was tinged with gold and grey,
And under our feet the dead men lay,
Stiff by the loop-holed barricade;
Food of the bomb and the hand-grenade;
Still in the slushy pool and mud—
Ah! the path we came was a path of blood,
When we went to Loos in the morning.

A little grey church at the foot of a hill,
With powdered glass on the window-sill.
The shell-scarred stone and the broken tile,
Littered the chancel, nave and aisle—
Broken the altar and smashed the pyx,
And the rubble covered the crucifix;
This we saw when the charge was done,
And the gas-clouds paled in the rising sun,
As we entered Loos in the morning.

The dead men lay on the shell-scarred plain,
Where Death and the Autumn held their reign—
Like banded ghosts in the heavens grey
The smoke of the powder paled away;
Where riven and rent the spinney trees
Shivered and shook in the sullen breeze,

And there, where the trench through the graveyard wound,
The dead men's bones stuck over the ground
By the road to Loos in the morning.

The turret towers that stood in the air,
Sheltered a foeman sniper there—
They found, who fell to the sniper's aim,
A field of death on the field of fame;
And stiff in khaki the boys were laid
To the sniper's toll at the barricade,
But the quick went clattering through the town,
Shot at the sniper and brought him down,
As we entered Loos in the morning.

The dead men lay on the cellar stair,
Toll of the bomb that found them there.

In the street men fell as a bullock drops,
Sniped from the fringe of Hulluch copse.
And the choking fumes of the deadly shell
Curtained the place where our comrades fell,
This we saw when the charge was done
And the East blushed red to the rising sun
In the town of Loos in the morning.

TO MARGARET

If we forget the Fairies,
And tread upon their rings,
God will perchance forget us,
And think of other things.

When we forget you, Fairies,
Who guard our spirits' light:
God will forget the morrow,
And Day forget the Night.

DEATH AND THE FAIRIES

Before I joined the Army
I lived in Donegal,
Where every night the Fairies
Would hold their carnival.

But now I'm out in Flanders,
Where men like wheat-ears fall,
And it's Death and not the Fairies
Who is holding carnival.

THE RETURN

THERE's a tramp o' feet in the mornin',
There's an oath from an N.C.O.,
As up the road to the trenches
The brown battalions go:
Guns and rifles and wagons,
Transports and horses and men,
Up with the flush of the dawnin',
And back with the night again.

Back again from the battle,
From the mates we've left behind,
And our officers are gloomy
And the N.C.O.'s are kind;

When a Jew's harp breaks the silence,
Purring an old refrain,
Singing the song of the soldier,
"Here we are again!"

Here we are!
Here we are!
Oh! here we are again!
Some have gone west,
Best of the best,
Lying out in the rain,
Stiff as stones in the open,
Out of the doings for good.
They'll never come back to advance or attack;
But, God! don't we wish that they could!

RED WINE

Now seven supple lads and clean
Sat down to drink one night,
Sat down to drink at Nouex-les-Mines
And then went off to fight;
And seven supple lads and clean
Are finished with the fight,
But only three at Nouex-les-Mines
Sit down to drink to-night.

And when we took the cobbled road
We often took before,
Our thoughts were with the hearty lads
Who trod that way no more.

Oh! lads out on the level fields,
If you could call to mind
The good red wine at Nouex-les-Mines
You would not stay behind!

And when we left the trench to-night,
Each weary with his load,
Grey, silent ghosts, as light as air,
Came with us down the road.
And now we sit us down to drink
You sit beside us, too,
And drink red wine at Nouex-les-Mines
As once you used to do.

THE DAWN

(*Givenchy.*)

THE dawn comes creeping o'er the plains,
The saffron clouds are streaked with red,
I hear the creaking limber chains,
I see the drivers raise the reins
And urge their weary mules ahead.

And men go up and men go down,
The marching hosts are grand to see
In shrapnel-shivered trench and town,
In spinneys where the leaves of brown
Are falling on the dewy lea.

Lonely and still the village lies,
The houses sleeping, the blinds all drawn.

The road is straight as the bullet flies,
The villagers fix their waking eyes
On the shrapnel smoke that shrouds the
dawn.

Out of the battle, out of the night,
Into the dawn and the blush of day,
The road that takes us back from the fight,
The road we love, it is straight and white,
And it runs from the battle, away, away.

THE FLY

Buzz-fly and gad-fly, dragon-fly and blue,
When you're in the trenches come and visit you,
They revel in your butter-dish and riot on your ham,
Drill upon the army cheese and loot the army jam.
They're with you in the dusk and the dawning and the noon,
They come in close formation, in column and platoon.
There's never zest like Tommy's zest when these have got to die:
For Tommy takes his puttees off and strafs the blooming fly.

OUT YONDER

You may see his eye shine brightly, for he
bears his burden lightly,
As he makes his journey nightly up the long
road from Bethune,
With his bayonet briskly swinging, and you'll
hear him singing, singing,
In the silence and the silver, molten silver,
of the moon.

Young and eager—bright his face is, spirit
of the shrapneled places
Where the homes are battered, broken, and
the land in ruin lies.

But the young adventure burning gives him never time for yearning,
And the natal flame of roving gleams like lightning in his eyes.

What awaits you, boy, out yonder, where the great guns rip and thunder?
There's a menace in their message—guns that called you from afar.
But where'er your fortunes guide you may no woe or ill betide you—
Heaven speed you, little soldier, gaily going to the war.

I WILL GO BACK

I'LL go back again to my father's house and
live on my father's land—
For my father's house is by Rosses' shore
that slopes to Dooran strand,
And the wild mountains of Donegal rise up
on either hand.

I have been gone from Donegal for seven
years and a day,
And true enough it's a long, long while for a
wanderer to stay—
But the hills of home are aye in my heart
and never are far away.

The long white road winds o'er the hill from
Fanad to Kilcar,
And winds apast Gweebara Bay where the
deep sea-waters are—
Where the long grey boats go out by night
to fish beyond the bar.

I'll lie by the beach the livelong day, where
the foreshore dips to the sea—
When the sun is red on the golden gorse as
once it used to be;
And, O! but it's many an olden thought will
come up in the heart of me.

For the friends of my youth shall gather
around, the friends that I knew of old,
The olden songs will be sung to me and the
old, old stories told

Beside the fire of my father's house when
the nights are long and cold.

'Tis there that I'll pass my years away, back
in my native land;
In my father's house by Rosses' shore that
lies by Dooran strand,
Where the hills of ancient Donegal rise up
on either hand.

THE FARMER'S BOY

[Every May, a great number of Donegal youths, whose ages range from twelve to fifteen years, go to the hiring fair of Strabane in the Co. Tyrone, and there, in the market-place, they are sold like cattle to the highest bidder. Their wages range from £3 to £5 for six months, and they have to work about eighteen hours a day.]

WHEN I went o'er the mountains a farmer's
boy to be,
My mother wept all morning when taking
leave of me;
My heart was heavy in me, but I threpт that
I was gay:
A man of twelve should never weep when
going far away.

In the country o'er the mountains the rough roads straggle down,
There's many a long and weary mile 'twixt there and Glenties town;
I went to be a farmer's boy, to work the season through,
From Whitsuntide to Hallowe'en, which time the rent came due.

When virgin pure, the dawn's white arm stole o'er my mother's door,
From Glenties town I took the road I never trod before;
Come Lammas tide I would not see the trout in Greenan's Burn,
And Hallowe'en might come and go, but I would not return.

My mother's love for me is warm; her house
is cold and bare:
A man who wants to see the world has little
comfort there;
And there 'tis hard to pay the rent, for all
you dig and delve,
But there's hope beyond the mountains for a
little man of twelve.

When I went o'er the mountains I worked
for days on end,
Without a soul to cheer me through or one
to call me friend;
With older mates I toiled and toiled, in rain
and heat and wind,
And kept my place. A Glenties man is never
left behind.

The farmer's wench looked down on me, for
she was spruce and clean,
But men of twelve don't care for girls like
lads of seventeen;
And sorrow take the farmer's wench! her
pride could never hold
With mine when hoeing turnip fields with
fellows twice as old.

And so from May to Hallowe'en I wrought
and felt content,
And sent my wages through the post to pay
my mother's rent;
For I kept up the Glenties name, and blest,
when all was done,
The pride that gave a man of twelve the
strength of twenty-one.

THE DUG-OUT

Deeper than the daisies in the rubble and the loam,
Wayward as a river the winding trenches roam,
Past bowed, decrepit dug-outs leaning on their props,
Beyond the shattered village where the lightest limber stops;

Through fields untilled and barren, and ripped by shot and shell,—
The bloodstained braes of Souchez, the meadows of Vermelles,

And poppies crown the parapet that rises
from the mud—
Where the soldiers' homes—the dug-outs
—are built of clay and blood.

Our comrades on the level roofs, the dead
men, waste away
Upon the soldiers' frontier homes, the
crannies in the clay;
For on the meadows of Vermelles, and all
the country round,
The stiff and still stare at the skies, the
quick are underground.

STRAF' THAT FLY

(*Bully-Grenay.*)

THERE's the butter, gad, and horse-fly
The blow-fly and the blue,
The fine fly and the coarse fly,
But never flew a worse fly
Of all the flies that flew

Than the little sneaky black fly
That gobbles up our ham,
The beggar's not a slack fly,
He really is a crack fly,
And wolfs the soldiers' jam.

So straf' that fly! our motto
Is "Straf' him when you can."
He'll die because he ought to,
He'll go because he's got to,
So at him, every man!

THE STAR-SHELL

(*Loos.*)

A STAR-SHELL holds the sky beyond
Shell-shivered Loos, and drops
In million sparkles on a pond
That lies by Hulluch copse.

A moment's brightness in the sky,
To vanish at a breath,
And die away, as soldiers die
Upon the wastes of death.

AFTER THE WAR

When I come back to England,
And times of Peace come round,
I'll surely have a shilling,
And maybe have a pound.
I'll walk the whole town over,
And who shall say me nay,
For I'm a British soldier
With a British soldier's pay.

I only joined for fun,
Never joined for profit—
The Army pay is good,
But, God! there's little of it.

When I come back to England
I won't be half a swell—
Ribbons for the scrapping
At Loos and New Chapelle.
I'll search the whole town over
To find another trade,
And be a blooming boot-black
On Charing Cross parade.

I will not leave for fun—
The change will bring me profit.
The Army pay is good,
But, God! there's little of it.

A SOLDIER'S PRAYER

GIVENCHY village lies a wreck, Givenchy
Church is bare,
No more the peasant maidens come to say
their vespers there.
The altar rails are wrenched apart, with
rubble littered o'er,
The sacred, broken sanctuary-lamp lies
smashed upon the floor;
And mute upon the crucifix He looks upon
it all—
The great white Christ, the shrapnel-
scourged, upon the eastern wall.

He sees the churchyard delved by shells, the tombstones flung about,
And dead men's skulls, and white, white bones the shells have shovelled out;
The trenches running line by line through meadow fields of green,
The bayonets on the parapets, the wasting flesh between;
Around Givenchy's ruined church the levels, poppy-red,
Are set apart for silent hosts, the legions of the dead.

And when at night on sentry-go, with danger keeping tryst,
I see upon the crucifix the blood-stained form of Christ

Defiled and maimed, the merciful on vigil all
the time,
Pitying his children's wrath, their passion
and their crime.
Mute, mute He hangs upon His Cross, the
symbol of His pain,
And as men scourged Him long ago, they
scourge Him once again—
There in the lonely war-lit night to Christ
the Lord I call,
"Forgive the ones who work Thee harm. O
Lord, forgive us all."

DUG-OUT PROVERBS

HERE are the Old Sweats sayings. He tells
the tale of his trade—
Gleanings from trench and dug-out, battle,
fatigue, parade.

'Tis said the Boche has pluck enough. Of
this I have no doubt,
But see him in the darkest light until you've
knocked him out.

Your dug-out took you hours to build. Got
broken in a minute!
A rotten shame! Be thankful, son, your
carcass isn't in it.

And if one shelters you a night tend it roof
and rafter,
And make it better than it was—for those
who follow after.

"The trench is calm," you say, my son. The
Boche is keeping quiet.
Then keep your rifle close at hand. We soon
shall have a riot.

A soldier's life is risky; it may end damn
quick. Well, let it!
Since we get five francs every week we'll
burst it when we get it.

You may cough and sneeze in your dug-out,
but you can't go anywhere.
There's little health around the house—the
dead are lying there.

You may dig as deep as a spade can dig, but
the Boche's eye can tell
Where the khaki moles have plied their
trade, and the beggars burrow well.

Pray to God when the dirt* flies over and
the country flops about,
But stick to your dug-out all the same until
you're ordered out.

When guns are going large a bit and sending
gifts from Krupp,
You've got to keep your napper low, but keep
your spirits up.

These are the dug-out maxims which the
"Old Sweats" fling about,
For the better education of the "rooky"
newly out.

* Dirt. Trench term for shells.

MATEY

(*Cambrin, May, 1915.*)

Not comin' back to-night, mátey,
And reliefs are comin' through,
We're all goin' out all right, matey,
Only we're leavin' you.
Gawd! it's a bloody sin, matey,
Now that we've finished the fight,
We go when reliefs come in, matey,
But you're stayin' 'ere to-night.

Over the top is cold, matey—
You lie on the field alone,
Didn't I love you of old, matey,
Dearer than the blood of my own?

You were my dearest chum, matey—
(Gawd! but your face is white)
But now, though reliefs 'ave come, matey,
I'm goin' alone to-night.

I'd sooner the bullet was mine, matey—
Goin' out on my own,
Leavin' you 'ere in the line, matey,
All by yourself, alone.
Chum o' mine and you're dead, matey,
And this is the way we part,
The bullet went through your head, matey,
But Gawd! it went through my 'eart.

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